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AN 'IMĀRAH IN THE CENTRAL RIF: THE ANNUAL PILGRIMAGE TO SĪDĪ KHIYĀR

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[Title Page]

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ANNUAL pilgrimages, or *'imārāt* (sing. *'imārah*), to the tombs of certain saints are a major feature not only of the saint cult in Morocco, but of Maghribi Islam in general. A few of these, such as the *Naskhah*, occurring on 15 Sha'bān, to the shrine of Mūlāi 'Abd al-Salām ibn Mshīsh in Banī 'Arūs in the Jbālah, or the visits to the sepulchres of Mūlāi Idrīs in Zarhūn or Sīdī Muḥammad ibn 'Aisā in Meknes, are events to which the faithful gather from all over the country. Seven successive pilgrimages to the tombs both of Mūlāi Idrīs and Mūlāi 'Abd al-Salām equal, according to Moroccans, one to Mecca. The pilgrimage in these instances is supplemented by the activities of members of, variously, the Haddāwa (at Mūlāi 'Abd al-Salām), 'Aisāwa or Ḥamādsha (in Meknes) brotherhoods, who smoke *kīf* (*Cannabis indica*, a narcotic not unlike marijuana), beat drums, chew and swallow live coals, put skewers through their cheeks and work themselves into a frenzy in order to identify themselves with the spirit of the saint with whose tomb they are associated; and, if possible, to merge with the Infinite.

There are many other saints, however, mostly of a more local and less national character, whose devotees show far more restraint in their behavior than the members of the brotherhoods mentioned above. One of these is Sīdī Bū Khiyār, buried in the southern mountains of the Central Rifian tribe of Aith Wariyāghir; and nothing like the above occurs at the annual pilgrimage to his tomb, for the members of these orders are held in very low repute in the Rif and are not encouraged to come there. A description of this pilgrimage, wich I witnessed on 1 August 1955, is, I think, of ethnographic interest not only for its own sake but because of the light it sheds on the Berber attitude toward Islam.

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788 Sīdī Bū Khiyār («My Lord the Father of the Cucumber») was,
778 according to tradition, an itinerant *murābiṭ* or holy man from the
792 Sahara who reached the Central Rif completely destitute, without
173 family, servants or possessions. Of when this event occurred, or from what part of the Sahara he originated, we have absolutely no indication. Rifians today say that he was not a *sharīf* (pl. *shurfā*), or descendant of the Prophet, and this is negatively and locally confirmed by the fact that no mention is made of him in the genealogies of the Imrabdhen section (*ar-rbaʿ* or *thakhammasth*, according to the context) of the tribe (*thaqbīsth*) of Aith Wariyāghir, who, despite their sobriquet, are shurfā descended from Sīdī Ibrāhīm al-Aʿraj («My Lord Abraham the Lame»), whose own lineage ascends to Mūlāi Idrīs. We may note here, parenthetically, that although the Rifians make a genealogical and functional distinction between *shurfā* and *murābiṭīn* (pl. of *murābiṭ*), they do not differentiate between them terminologically; in the Rifian dialect of Berber, both are called *imrābdhen*, derived from Arabic *murābiṭīn*.

778 In any event, Sīdī Bū Khiyār was to become far more important
788 in the religious aspects of tribal life than most of the Imrābdhen. for no organized visits have ever been made to any of the latters' tombs. After settling on the windswept and desolate mountain peak which bears his name, Sīdī Bū Khiyār became famous as a spellbinder who could attract crowds of lesser murābiṭīn from as far as ten to fifteen days' journey away. He never married, and he died without issue on his mountain top; but the name Bū Khiyār is one wich many mountain Rifians are given to this day.

788 The pilgrimage to Sīdī Bū Khiyār's grave is today a local fes-
778 tival entirely. albeit the most important and significant one in the
575 Central Rif. The only religious brotherhood involved is that of the
795 ʿAlawiyyīn, a recently formed order of Algerian origin. whose members bear no relationship to the saint other than the fact that some of them happen to live in the area, and whose litany is a far more toned-down and sedate affair than those of any of the orders mentioned above, as we shall see.

778 The tomb of Sīdī Bū Khiyār is situated on the summit which
133 overlooks the Turīrth-Timarzga-Aith ʿAmmarth Pass and dominates the massif of the Jbil Ḥamām, The Mountain of Doves, which, at

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an altitude of 6500 feet, is the highest point in the whole tribe of Aith Wariyāghir. It is located above the village (*adshār*) of Bū Ma'dān, in the district (*r'ayyith*) of Timarzga. The tomb itself, a simple structure unadorned with the usual white cupola, was, in time, supplemented with a small mosque of mud and stone, today in a state of disrepair owing to the ravages of wind, snow, sleet and ice. The actual pinnacle of the massif is not the site of the tomb proper, but a point about 150 feet above it, called Tamrābiṭ. Upon ascending this point, after a spine-shattering journey by jeep up the tortuously winding *piste* from the Wednesday Market of Aith Turīrth (Spanish *Zoco de Arbaa Taurirt*), one realizes that one is at the top of the Central Rif. Almost all of Aith Wariyāghir is below one to the north, and only one or two of the Azru Uqshar peaks in the tribe of Igzinnāyen to the southeast, discernible in outline on a clear day, are higher. Just east of the tomb-mosque complex is a flat space measuring about 600 feet by 300 feet, used for prayer, and just above and north of this is a small grove of *ādhān* (from, by association, the Arabic for «prayer-call»?) trees; and between the mosque and the tomb itself is a small open area called the *Sūq al-Ṣāliḥīn* the Market of the Righteous.

The pilgrimage takes place on 9 Dhū l-Ḥijjah, one day before the 'Aid al-Kabīr or Great Feast of Islam, called *r-'Aid Umquran* by the Rifians. People come from all over the southern mountain districts of Aith Wariyāghir, as well as from the neighboring tribes of Aith 'Ammarth and Igzinnāyen, to attend it. The greatest number are locals from Timarzga (Jbil, Aith Wariyāghir), after which come those from Aith 'Arūs (Jbil, Aith Wariyāghir), Aith 'Ammarth, Aith Bū 'Avyāsh (Aith Wariyāghir), Zāwīth n Sīdī 'Abd r-Qādir of the Imrābdhen of Aith Ḥadhīfah (Aith Wariyāghir), Mārruwī in Aith 'Abd Allāh (Aith Wariyāghir), Iṣrīḥan in Aith Yūsif w 'Arī (Aith Wariyāghir), and Igzinnāyen. In 1955, all the tribal authorities of the Nkūr qaidate of Aith Wariyāghir (Ait Bū 'Avvāsh and Jbil), as well as the Spanish *interventores* both of Aith Wariyāghir and Aith 'Ammarth, were also present.

By about 10:00 A. M., most of the pilgrims, wearing their best clothes, have assembled on the mountain top, where their first act is to visit the shrine. Merchants are busy setting up their small

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778 canvas tents in the Market of the Righteous, as they would do in
788 any ordinary tribal market (*sūq*). They sell just the same articles,
443 from clothing and bill-hooks (I purchased two of the latter here)
to soap and matches, as they do in the regular markets, and some
of them also sell sheep to be ritually slaughtered for the 'Aid
[562] al-Kabīr on the following day. As in a normal market, also, men
and women remain sharply segregated.

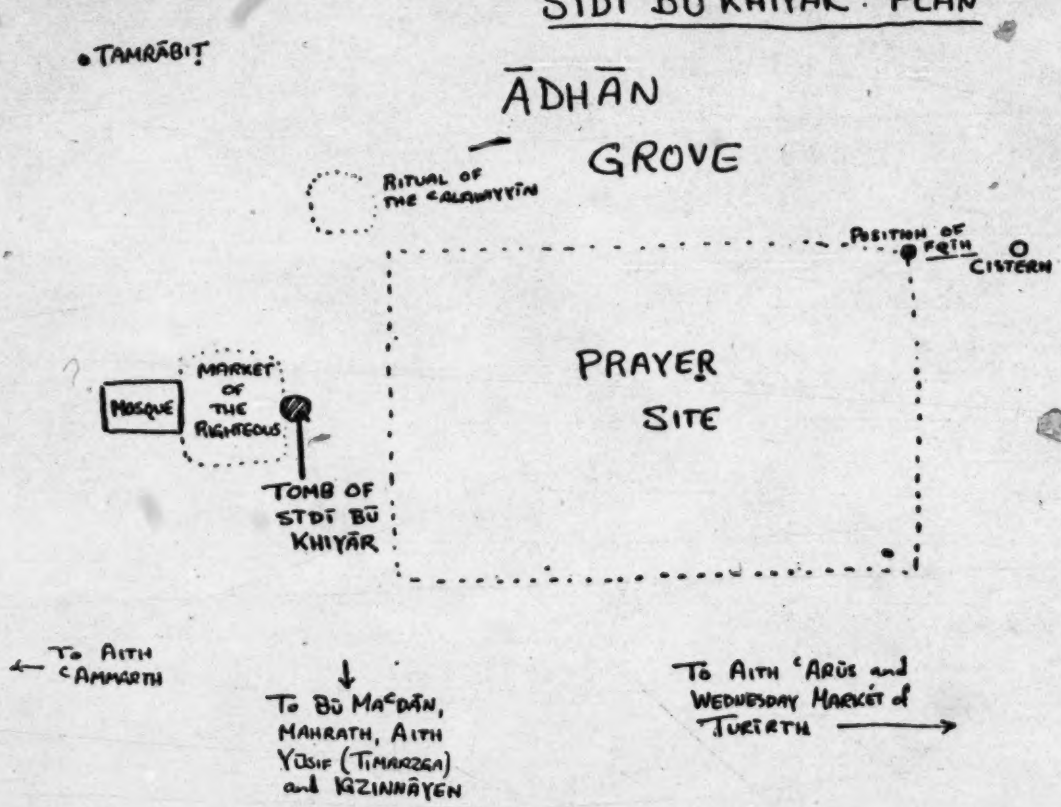
788 Among the pilgrims are numerous *ṭulbā* or students of the
735 Qur'ān, who, after visiting the tomb, where they recite the Holy
Book from beginning to end, proceed to the Market of the Righteous
to ask the faithful for contributions (*ma'rūf*), which are placed in
a box beside the tomb put there for the purpose. The money is later
counted up by the tribal authorities and divided equally among all the
ṭulbā attending (1).

788 The 'imārah of Sīdī Bū Khiyār has also, within the last two
778 decades, become a focal point in the activities of the local members
795 of the brotherhood of the 'Alawiyyīn, who maintain a not insignifi-
575 cant following in Timarzga and Aith 'Arūs, although they do not
781 have a lodge in either of these districts. After paying their respects
to the saint, they congregate for their *miima'*, or reunion, at a spot
between the ādhān grove and the mosque. Here, for an hour and
a half to two hours, they go through the litany (*dhikr*) required by
their order. This consists of a constant repetition of the formula
Lā ilāha illā 'llāh, «There is no god but God», over and over, while
the brethren are standing in a circle. The litany is followed by the
'imrah, a form of rhythmic breathing designed to induce ecstasy:
and the 'imrah of the 'Alawiyyīn (the word is *not* to be confused
with *'imārah*) progresses through the following routines, in which
the underlined and accented vocalizations denote outgo, and the
non-underlined ones, intake, of breath:

(1) In 1955, there were 99 ṭulbā from the Ibīl (Timarzga-Turīrh-Aith 'Arūs) of Aith Warivāghir, who collected 717.75 pesetas: 96 from Aith 'Abd Allāh of Aith Warivāghir, who collected 696.00 ptas.; 87 from Aith 'Ammarth, who got 630.75 ptas.; 75 from Aith Bū 'Ayyāsh of Aith Warivāghir, who got 471.25 ptas.; 39 from Aith Ḥadhīfah of Aith Warivāghir, who received 282.75 ptas.; 15 from Imrābdhen of Aith Warivāghir, who got 108.75 ptas.; and 10 from Iezinnāven, who received 72.50 ptas. Total ṭulbā attending were 421, and total money collected was 2990.25 pesetas.

[Text continues on p. 243]

SIDI BŪ KHIYĀR : PLAN



17—Tamuda

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TRIBES OF THE RIF

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A) Húnh! Hunh! Húnh! Hunh! Húnh! Hunh! Húnh! Hunh! 788
B) Hunh! Hunh! Húnh! Húnh! Hunh! Hunh! Húnh! Húnh! 781
C) Hunh! Húnh! Hunh! Húnh! Hunh! Húnh! Hunh! Húnh! 575 795
D) Same as B) above. 778
E) Same as C) above.

When I arrived at Sīdī Bū Khiyār, about noon, the show which the 'Alawiyyīn put on was just ending, so I unfortunately saw almost nothing of it. What little I did see, while trying to peer over the heads of the crowd that had collected, indicated that the 'Alawī litany and ritual, which is performed without the use of drums or musical instruments of any kind, is an energetic and muscular affair, which keeps its practitioners in good physical condition; for they were all jumping up into the air to the accompaniment of the breathing routines given above. It was, however, a very far cry from the howling and self-flagellation indulged in by the 'Aisāwa and Ḥamādsha to induce trances. Furthermore, after the 'Alawi litany was over, all the participants got up and went about their business without further ado; no one seemed to be recovering from the effects of a self-induced trance. It had merely been good healthy exercise.

Of even greater interest, perhaps, was the attitude of the crowd, [771] one of mild curiosity followed by almost complete indifference, an attitude which not only marks the Rifian's outlook on religious brotherhoods in general, for he is not apt to join them, but toward most features of alien cultures which he has no desire to assimilate.

After the ṭulbā have finished collecting their ma'rūf, and the 788 'Alawiyyīn have terminated their ritual, the whole having lasted 778 some two to three hours, the pilgrims all perform their ablutions [783] prior to prayer. Some have, in the meantime, and for their own pleasure, visited the pinnacle of Tamrābiṭ; there seems to be nothing particularly meritorious in so doing, for the holiest feature of the point is its name, although it may once have been of some ceremonial significance.

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The common prayer, held on the flat prayer site just below 788 Sīdī Bū Khiyār's tomb, is the focal point of the 'imārah. It is led by 782

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788 778 782 a *fqīh*, a schoolmaster from the cantonal mosque of Timarzga, who stands at the northeast corner of the prayer site, between the site itself and a cistern a few yards away. The men about to pray form long parallel lines, of over a hundred to each line, all the way back to the tomb.

The act of prayer in this particular place and on this particular occasion was one which, in my opinion, was unparalleled in simple dignity. The reverence which overcame the worshippers was something very personal and something very startling in its intensity. Here the Rifian was as close to and as intimate with his God as he would ever be, probably, during his life on earth.

The words of the prayer-call, familiar to all who have studied Arabic, became, on this occasion, as I heard them from the ādhān grove, blurred into a monotonous sea of vocalisms, rising and falling as the call was relayed back from line to line. Each line of men has its *muṣammiʿ*, who repeats to the men in his row what the fqīh has said, so they will hear it more distinctly. They all come through loud and clear on the *takbīr* (*Allāhu Akbar*, «God is Most Great»), but the rest of it tends to degenerate into a jumble, for, outside [191] the fqīh, there is only about one man in five hundred who speaks, writes or understands Arabic with any fluency at all; and the rest must perforce try to catch the words of the very, very few who comprehend what is being said. There are always, also, a few old women and widows who pray, but they do so apart from the men entirely, on the other side of the grove; and it is doubtful whether they can hear the fqīh at all.

Although some pilgrims bring food with them which they eat either before or after praying, the prayer is the last item on the agenda. After it is over, everyone goes home, to kill his sheep in the bosom of his family the next day. By mid-afternoon, most people have saddled up their donkeys and departed, and the peak of Sīdī Bū Khiyār is as bare and desolate as it was before.

788 778 [222] If the 'imārah falls at the end of summer, at the time that the grapes in the mountains begin to ripen, grape-picking may begin immediately after the 'Aid al-Kabīr, with no signal given by the village headmen.

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This is all that happens at the shrine of Sīdī Bū Khiyār, and no more. There is a complete lack of the «sensational» aspects of certain other Moroccan pilgrimages, and even the behavior of the 'Alawiyyīn is fully under control. The whole thing is carried off with a maximum of correctness and decorum: the tribesmen gravely pay their respects to the memory of their saint by placing a *ziyārah* [735] in money, which is later distributed among the ṭulbā as charity, in the box beside his tomb; and then they pray. Nevertheless, the fact that they do so haltingly and imperfectly, in a language which is foreign to them, is, in a sense, a reflection of the Berber outlook on Islam as a whole: although they have taken to it unanimously and unquestioningly, their acceptance of it has, in the long run, been very largely, if not entirely, on their own terms and conditioned by their own culture.